

Nadler Meets with Ford Foundation

Sunday, 02 November 2003

New York -- Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) met today with Susan Berresford, President of the Ford Foundation, following recent reports that the organization has funded groups that openly instigate anti-Semitism and/or attempt to de-legitimize Israel and oppose its right to exist. In a letter to the Ford Foundation, Nadler called on the philanthropic entity to better monitor organizations that benefit from its funding and ensure that its grantees are not engaging in promoting anti-Semitism or the de-legitimization of the State of Israel. Twenty Members of Congress joined Nadler in signing the letter.

Nadler's statement regarding his meeting with Berresford is as follows:

"I was pleased that Ms. Berresford was able to meet with me today following recent reports that the Ford Foundation has granted funds to organizations that promote anti-Semitism. We had a useful conversation, in which she committed to me that the Ford Foundation will not fund groups that espouse anti-Semitism, promote violence, or deny the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

"In addition to the suggestions listed in my letter to the Ford Foundation regarding creating transparency and de-funding grantees engaging in objectionable behavior, I made further recommendations during our meeting. These include ways the Ford Foundation could be sure that it is not funding such groups in the future, and could assure the public of that commitment. I have recommended, for example, that the Ford Foundation become a leader in training the human rights NGO community around the world to stop the burgeoning problem of unchecked anti-Semitism and de-legitimization of the State of Israel in the human rights arena.

"Ms. Berresford promised to respond to my letter and other recommendations in the near future. I look forward to hearing what concrete actions the Ford Foundation plans on taking to better monitor its grantees and stop all funding for those who engage in the promotion of hate and/or violence, anti-Semitism, and the denial of the legitimacy of Israel's existence."

In addition to Nadler, the Members of Congress who signed on to the letter to the Ford Foundation are: Representatives Eliot Engel (D-NY), Tim Holden (D-PA), Barney Frank (D-MA), Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), Howard Berman (D-CA), Steve Israel (D-NY), Michael McNulty (D-NY), Robert Wexler (D-FL), Anthony Weiner (D-NY), Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Gary Ackerman (D-NY), Henry Waxman (D-CA), Tom Lantos (D-CA), Chris Cannon (R-UT), Phil Crane (R-IL), Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Martin Frost (D-TX), and Robert Matsui (D-CA). The text of the letter is as follows:

Ms. Susan V. Berresford

President

Ford Foundation

320 East 43rd Street

New York, NY 10017

Dear Ms. Berresford,

The Ford Foundation has proven itself to be one of the preeminent charitable organizations in the world. Your organization has helped millions of people around the world to overcome poverty, hunger and lack of access to quality health care and education. It is for these reasons that this letter is so difficult to write.

We are extremely concerned with the Ford Foundation's funding of organizations that have openly and purposefully instigated anti-Semitism, called for the destruction of the State of Israel, and/or engaged in the promotion of violence. While many philanthropic entities have made grants to organizations in the mistaken belief that they would be used for humanitarian purposes, it is highly unusual for such entities to turn a blind eye when confronted with clear evidence that the grant recipients had used those funds in support of bigotry or the incitement of violence.

As you know, several media outlets have reported recently that the Ford Foundation has funded, and continues to fund, organizations that engage in these types of destructive activities. The reports have stated that such organizations consider your funding "pivotal" to their work.

In at least two of the highlighted cases, your grantees were principal players in undermining important international efforts to fight bigotry at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa last year. You may recall that Secretary of State Colin Powell refused to attend the Durban Conference, and the United States delegation eventually withdrew, because the conference had abandoned its mission. It had instead become a platform for some of the most virulent anti-Semitic activities ever seen in an international forum.

One such organization is the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, also known as LAW. LAW was an active participant at the Durban Conference, its members playing central roles in the steering committee and in general pre-conference organizing. But LAW's organizing efforts, according to the internationally-respected United NationsWatch, were aimed largely at destructive ends: "LAW was instrumental in creating an anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic focus at Durban."

Another Ford grantee involved in Durban, the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), was one of the primary instigators of a resolution that called for "the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between Israel and all states." PNGO, according to press reports, continues to this day to call for an international boycott against Israel and to work to label Israel as an illegitimate state. This is tantamount to calling for the destruction of the State of Israel. Despite having endured savage terrorist attacks aimed at its civilian populations, Israel has never proposed cutting off humanitarian or economic aid to the Palestinians or to anyone else.

While Durban was a virtual field day for anti-Semitic and anti-Israel activities, the reports find that Ford Foundation grantees have also engaged in deeply troubling behavior outside of that context. For example, the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, which publishes the "Palestine Report," has on its web site links to groups listed by the State Department as terrorist organizations, including the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Islamic Jihad and Hamas. These groups are known to be behind much of the terrorist violence in the region, and your grantee, by providing web-links to them is by extension, also promoting violence. Equally disturbing is the fact that some of these grantees, including PNGO, have refused to sign the US Government's "Certification Regarding Terrorist Financing," pursuant to Executive Order 13224. This document asks American-funded organizations to pledge that they do not "provide material support or resources to any individual or entity that advocates, plans, sponsors, engages in, or had engaged in terrorist activity."

Whatever the Ford Foundation's understanding may have been when these grants were first made, we are concerned that there appears to have been no effort to monitor the grantees to ensure that the funds were used for legitimate purposes.

We are also deeply troubled that the Foundation's initial responses to the reports' findings have been defensive. In fact, your spokesperson was quoted as saying, "We have seen no indication that our grantees in Durban or elsewhere engaged in anti-Semitic speech or activities." Given that these reports have now been published, it is now your obligation, at the very least, to investigate these allegations fully and expeditiously. Indeed, if, as your spokesperson continues, "the Foundation does not support hate speech of any kind," it is clear that funding these groups is anathema to your mission, and should cease.

The promotion of bigotry and violence is antithetical to the important aims the Ford Foundation and these grants were supposed to promote. The cause of peace and human rights in the Middle East can never be advanced by organizations that actively reject reconciliation, support violence, and openly obstruct the work of international organizations seeking to eliminate racism. While we do not agree with the political beliefs of these organizations, we believe in their right to express their political views. When however, those expressions cross the line into bigotry or the promotion of violence, as have been documented in these cases, the Ford Foundation must take a strong stand by eliminating their funding.

We urge you to undertake immediately a public review of Foundation grantees' activities to ensure that organizations engaged in the promotion of hate and/or violence, including those actively supporting anti-Semitism or the denial of the legitimacy of Israel's existence, do not receive funding. Where the facts indicate that these funds have been used for such illegitimate purposes, we strongly urge the Foundation immediately to stop the funding and demand a return of all funds used for improper purposes.

We look forward to your reply.

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